

# *Iowa Outdoors*

## **Iowa Department of Natural Resources**

**www.iowadnr.gov**

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**Feb. 10, 2009**

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### **DNR EXTENDS DEADLINE TO REMOVE PERMANENT ICE FISHING SHELTERS**

**CLEAR LAKE** – The Iowa Department of Natural Resources has extended the deadline to remove permanent ice fishing shelters from public waters of the state from Feb. 20 to Feb. 23. The extension gives owners an extra weekend to remove their shelters from the lakes.

Most of the permanent shelters are found in northern Iowa on the Iowa Great Lakes and on Clear Lake. From an estimated high of 150 shelters, about half were removed last weekend from Big Spirit Lake and West Okoboji Lake last weekend. Similarly, of the 90 shelters on Clear Lake, about half remained as of Tuesday morning.

Ice conditions have deteriorated across much of southern and central Iowa and any permanent shelters remaining on the ice should be removed with caution.

“What we don’t want is for anglers to wait until the last minute to get their shelters off the ice. We had a lot of rain yesterday and lost a lot of our snow. Once the temperature falls, those shelters will be frozen to the lake and it will take some work to get them free. There is still 24 inches of ice on these northern lakes and after the warm spell the extended forecast calls for seasonable temperatures which should allow for shelter removal,” said Jim Wahl, fisheries supervisor for the DNR covering northwest Iowa.

If a shelter falls through the ice, the owner is responsible for getting it out of the lake.

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[Hold until Feb. 12]

## **SAFE HUNTING YEAR**

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

As all the gear gets packed away until next fall, Iowa hunters can look back at an overall safe hunting year. While 2008 did record a firearm-related hunting death—in Hamilton County in September—and nearly a dozen injuries, the state remains on pace to mark the safest hunting decade on record.

With somewhere around 300,000 of us holding hunting licenses or landowner tags, that means quite a crowd on opening day and plenty of other overcast dawns in the duck blind, frosty mornings in the upland switchgrass...or days spent crunching through snow after whitetail deer. And while the incidents continue on a path that is about as low as you can get, there is still room for improvement.

“Some of the main causes of incidents continue to be shooting at running deer and not properly identifying your target...and just not being able to see your hunting partners out there; especially this past fall with all the vegetation; extra corn in the fields,” lists Megan Wisecup, recreational programs safety supervisor for the Department of Natural Resources.

She would like to see the day when that annual report card shows ‘zeroes’ all the way around. There have been three years, since 2000, with no fatalities recorded. Otherwise, one or two firearms hunting-related deaths still occur in a year...with the injuries ranging in the low to mid teens. Archery related incidents are tallied separately. Even one death, of course, is too many. Still, hunter safety is moving in the right direction, when compared to the 1960s and early ‘70s. Then, it was not uncommon to have 10 to 12 deaths per year attributed to hunting, along with 80 to 100 injuries. In 1965, 20 hunters died.

No surprise, then, that hunter education was promoted heavily in the late 60s: becoming mandatory in the early 1980s. Now, about 11,000 students—ranging from sub-teens to college students to parents sitting in as their kids go through—take the 10-hour course each year. Just about 2000 volunteers help instruct them. “I definitely see our hunter education program as one of the main components. I can see a significant difference in the trends,” stresses Wisecup. “It’s because of the awareness and education points being out there.”

Rather than just an entry in a year-end report, an incident now re-appears as a teaching tool. Students might be placed in a ‘shoot...don’t shoot’ situation on an outdoor safety trail. They practice handing over their gun, as they cross a fence; how to check to see if it’s unloaded...that the safety is on...and that the muzzle is pointed in a safe direction. Each skill helps lower the year end numbers that occur when a hurried response or momentary lapse resulted in an injury or worse.

There are other factors tied to the drop in hunter injuries and deaths. The rise in blaze orange clothing is an obvious plus. Mandatory for years for firearm deer hunters, it

is required for upland bird hunters, too. That bright orange showing through the underbrush or across a field can be a lifesaver, as a bird or buck breaks from the underbrush.

Also, hunter numbers have dipped noticeably in the last 40 years in Iowa; though the drop in hunting incidents is many times below that falloff in participants. With a solid safety record to build on, the next step is to retain or recruit more active hunters. “One of the biggest causes of the decline is time,” explains Wisecup. With all the scheduled activities in society today, it makes it real hard to compete; to get people out into these traditional sports.”

Iowa, though, is making good inroads in the past couple years with the Scholastic Clay Target Program and by introducing archery in schools. Iowa just certified its 100<sup>th</sup> school in the archery program. Last year, in the clay target competition took aim at a half million clays. Schools organize in a team event setup; with end of the year competition in a state meet; much like other sports. “We are trying to develop plans for the whole department to get involved in,” says Wisecup. “Not just young people, but other new hunters and shooters as well.”

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## **VISITORS DISCOVER AFFORDABLE WINTER ESCAPES AND ENTERTAINMENT AT HONEY CREEK**

MORAVIA, IA – Guests from Iowa and the Midwest are discovering the fun and entertainment at Honey Creek Resort State Park this winter.

According to Jeremie Slagle, general manager of the resort, Honey Creek is hosting several special events and overnight packages. Two events in March include a Jazz, Wine and Brew Fest on Saturday, March 14, and a “Spring Break at the Lake” special package from now through the end of March.

The jazz festival will feature wine and beer tasting from 13 Iowa wineries, four brewers, Templeton Rye Distillery and music from the jazz group Ashanti. Chef Patrick Koffman will prepare special food and cheese parings. Cost to attend the festival is \$25 per person.

“We are so excited to feature Iowa wineries and entertainment,” said Slagle. “We think people will really appreciate a chance to escape the winter blues, enjoy themselves at the fest, and experience the beautiful setting of our lakeshore resort.”

Families looking for an affordable spring break getaway, or just an escape from winter, can take advantage of the resort’s Spring Break at the Lake special. For as low as \$89/night for a standard room, families can stay at the resort and receive four free water park passes. Programs by state park interpreters will include Fireside Chats on Friday nights and Nature Arts and Crafts on Saturdays throughout March.

“From a family friendly menu in the restaurant, to nature activities for kids, to the arcade in the Buccaneer Bay water park, Honey Creek is the perfect, close-to-home destination for families,” said Slagle.

Interest in Honey Creek’s amenities is steadily growing, as more visitors experience what Honey Creek has to offer, according to Lee Fundanet, Director of Operations for Central Group Companies, which manages the resort.

“We’ve had great interest in our special events,” said Fundanet. “As an example, a Valentine’s package for this weekend has completely booked the hotel with overnight stays this Saturday, and mostly booked the Friday night prior.”

Currently, every Saturday night in February and the first two Saturdays in March are completely booked. Friday nights, week nights and the Saturdays of March 21 and 28 still have rooms available.

According to Slagle, the resort has been receiving room reservations at a fast pace. In the week of Feb. 2-9 alone, resort staff booked more than 800 reservations. The resort’s web site has received more than 75,000 hits since the resort opened. Many guests are looking forward to summer; the 28 new cabins, which will open in early summer, are 76 percent booked for the month of July.

For more information on special events, packages and nature programs, go to [www.honeycreekresort.com](http://www.honeycreekresort.com)

The brewers at the Jazz, Wine and Brew Fest include Raccoon River Brewing Company, Des Moines; Rock Bottom Brewery, West Des Moines; Granite City Brewing Company, West Des Moines and the Iowa Brewers Union. The Iowa wineries include: Fireside Winery, Marengo; Grape Escape Vineyard and Winery, Pleasantville; Heartland Harvest Winery, Fort Madison; Jasper Winery, Newton; Johnson Brothers, Des Moines; La Vida Loca, Indianola; Rosey Acres Winery, Runnells; Snus Hill Vineyard & Winery, Madrid; Southern Hills Winery, Osceola; Summerset Winery, Indianola; Tabor Home Vineyard and Winery, Baldwin; Tassel Ridge Winery, Leighton. Additionally, Templeton Rye Whiskey, Templeton, will be at the event.

### **About Honey Creek Resort State Park**

Honey Creek Resort State Park offers 105 guest rooms and suites, a 6,500 square foot convention center, 18-hole championship golf course, 15,000 square foot indoor water park, dining, an RV park and a variety of exciting outdoor adventures with interpretive programs and activities. Twenty-eight guest cabins will be open in spring 2009.

### **Driving directions:**

Located on Rathbun Lake in Appanoose County, Honey Creek Resort is just 20 minutes north of Centerville, 35 minutes southwest of Ottumwa and 95 miles southeast of Des Moines. Visitors can get there by taking Highway 5 to Moravia and turning west on County Road J18.

**From Des Moines:** From Interstate 35 south of Des Moines, take Highway 5 southeast through Albia. Turn west (right) at Moravia onto County Road J18. Turn left (south) on 185th Ave.

**From southern Iowa and Missouri:** Take Highway 5 north through Centerville. Turn west (left) onto County Road J18. Turn left (south) on 185th Ave.

**From Interstate 80 (Iowa City):** Take Highway 218/Exit 239 south from Iowa City. Turn west (right) onto Highway 34. Turn south (left) Albia onto Highway 5. Turn west (right) at Moravia onto County Road J18. Turn left (south) on 185th Ave.

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## **NEW BLUEGILL, CRAPPIE DAILY LIMIT DOES NOT APPLY TO PRIVATE LAKES, PONDS**

DES MOINES – The new daily bag limits on bluegills and crappies became effective on Jan. 21 for all public waters in the state. The new bag limit does not apply to private farm ponds or private lakes.

“We have been getting questions on the private water aspect of the rule and there is some confusion there, but we specifically excluded private ponds and lakes from the panfish bag limit,” said Mike Mason, interim chief of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources Fisheries Bureau.

He said some questioned that if the pond was stocked with fish from the DNR that they would be required to abide by the limit, but that is not the case.

“This rule does not apply to private ponds or lakes only public waters of the state,” Mason said.

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[Electronic photos available upon request]

## **IOWA FALCONERS STAGE WINTER FIELD MEET --- RUN RABBIT RUN**

By Lowell Washburn

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

SPIRIT LAKE---The scene was enough to send shivers down the fur of even the most predator-savvy cottontail. Hawks, humans, and hounds --- all working together in a combined effort to collect the main ingredient of a rabbit stew. The eminent danger was enough to send sensible bunnies scurrying for their burrows, which is exactly what the majority of them did.

Although the unlikely coalition of hunters may have appeared a bit bizarre to most folks, there was an easy explanation for it all. The members of this rather unique hunting party were all participants in the annual Winter Hawking Meet of the Iowa Falconer’s Association. Staged in northern Iowa’s Dickenson County, the three day event was conducted against a mixed backdrop of farm groves, fence lines, and public wildlife areas.

“For many falconers, the winter meet marks the high point of the entire hunting season,” says IFA President, Tom Deckert. “The hunt gives falconers an opportunity to spend time in the field while observing the hunting tactics and flight styles of various species of raptors. Even within the same species, individual birds seem to adapt their own hunting strategy and every flight is unique.”

A long time master falconer and professional Davenport firefighter, Deckert is currently flying a young-of-the-year Siberian goshawk --- the first of its kind ever used for falconry in Iowa. After wowing the crowd with its fearless nature and powerful flight style, the young bird conducted a couple of near misses before successfully bagging “two head of game” amongst the dense tangles of a public hunting area.

“Although the number of contemporary falconers is very small when compared with other groups of hunters [less than 50 falconers are licensed in Iowa], we had a strong turnout for this year’s winter meet,” noted field meet coordinator, Ross Dirks of Spirit Lake. “Participants flew just about everything there is from goshawks to gyrfalcons --- peregrines to red-tails. We also had a number of interested nonfalconers attend the outing. Overall, I think everyone was very pleased with the event.”

“The weather was great and rabbits were plentiful,” Dirks added. “Everyone had an opportunity to see some really spectacular flights. In most cases, predators [hawks] and prey [rabbits] are very evenly matched, and once the hawk is turned loose you never really know what’s going to happen. Although a number of cottontails were successfully brought to bag, most rabbits managed to escape which is exactly the way it works in nature.”

“It can be hard to explain to people who haven’t seen it, but hunting wild game with trained hawks or falcons is simply an incredible experience,” says Deckert. “Falconry is one of the world’s most ancient hunting techniques and the sport has changed very little during the past four thousand years. Basically, the hawks just do what they do every single day in the wild, which is to hunt for their food. The big difference is that trained raptors let you tag along and become part of that hunt. Falconry requires extreme dedication, but over time you begin to develop a real bond with your bird. It’s a high octane pastime and the hawk can fly away any time it chooses. That can make things a bit scary at times, but it’s worth it. When you’re out with your bird, every hunt becomes an adventure.”

To learn more about Iowa falconry, visit the Iowa Falconer’s Association online at: [iowa.falconer.com](http://iowa.falconer.com)

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## **BALD EAGLE PROGRAMS COME TO DES MOINES**

DES MOINES - Keep your head up and your eyes peeled for majestic bald eagles along Des Moines’ rivers this winter. While taking leisurely walks around Gray’s Lake, or fishing on the bridge at the Scott Street Dam, make sure to look to the skies to spot

bald eagles soaring overhead in search of a meal. And don't forget to scan the trees to see their enormous nests.

The Des Moines Parks and Recreation Department, the Department of Natural Resources and the Des Moines Public Library are partnering to present "*Eagle Sightings on the River*" which offers several captivating programs on eagles for all age groups free of charge.

Migrating from their northern nesting areas, eagles call Iowa home until mid-March. A year ago, several people reported seeing up to as many as a dozen eagles within one trip around Gray's Lake. The DNR reported at least 200 active eagle nests in Iowa in its 2007 nest census.

In honor of the winged visitors, the Des Moines Parks and Recreation Department invites you to spy on the bald eagle, our national symbol, at a Lunch and Learn on Friday, Feb. 20, from 11 a.m. – 2 p.m. The program will provide facts about eagles and offer an up close view of a replica eagle nest.

Bring your lunch or simply enjoy the complimentary hot beverages at the Scott Street Dam while viewing the bald eagles. Two 15-minute presentations by Pat Schlarbaum wildlife diversity specialist with the Iowa DNR begin at noon and 1 p.m.

Viewing scopes and binoculars will be provided between 11 a.m. and 2 p.m.

The Des Moines Public Library will have a huge replica eagle nest with life-sized carved adult eagles, eggs and, of course, a little hatchling. Kids and adults alike will be amazed at the size and shape of the magnificent creation. The nest will be on display in the main lobby at Central Library February 3-19.

Drop by Central Library downtown for several special events on Wednesday, February 11; learn about "Eagles and their Feathered Friends." Little tykes ages 3-5 will enjoy these story times, where they'll hear stories about eagles and other intriguing birds. This free *Family Story Time* program is open to daycares at 10:15 a.m. and to families during the 10:45 a.m.

At 4 p.m., it's "Eagles Up Close," an after-school program where children ages 5 and up will be able to talk to an eagle expert from the DNR and see a real, live eagle. Children will also participate in crafts and enjoy a light snack.

At 6 p.m., bring the whole family to the library for a fascinating free screening of "American Eagle." You'll learn about our national symbol and the great work being done by environmentalists to protect them. Then talk to an eagle rehabilitator and find out how the experts care for injured eagles.

The film was recently displayed on IPTV. Those in attendance can meet filmmaker Neil Rettig, and learn all about our nation's national symbol, its resurgence, and the great work being done by environmentalists. Spread your wings and soar to the library for this fun learning experience.

For information on these programs contact Teva Dawson, Parks and Recreation at 323-8907 or email [tldawson@dmgov.org](mailto:tldawson@dmgov.org) and Jan Kaiser, Des Moines Public Library at 515-283-4103 or email [JDKaiser@desmoineslibrary.com](mailto:JDKaiser@desmoineslibrary.com). You can also visit their websites at [www.dmparks.org](http://www.dmparks.org) and [www.desmoineslibrary.com](http://www.desmoineslibrary.com).

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## **GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT**

Feeding birds, and watching them from the indoor comfort of home, is something many Iowans do regularly throughout the winter. Why not spend a few extra minutes and take part in a citizen science project?

Join the more than 85,000 people who last year reported 635 species and nearly 10 million individual birds in the Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC). Find out all you need to know to participate at [www.birdcount.org](http://www.birdcount.org) or call your local conservation department to find out how to participate without internet access.

Each year, in addition to entering their tallies, participants submit thousands of digital images for the GBBC photo contest. Many are featured in the popular online gallery. Participants in the 2009 count are also invited to upload their bird videos to [YouTube](http://YouTube); some will also be featured on the GBBC web site. Visit [www.birdcount.org](http://www.birdcount.org) to learn more.

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## **NATURAL RESOURCE COMMISSION TO MEET FEB. 12 IN DES MOINES**

DES MOINES – The Natural Resource Commission of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources will meet at 8:30 a.m., Feb. 12, in the fifth floor conference rooms in the Wallace State Office Building, in Des Moines.

Commission and DNR staff will meet at 1 p.m., Feb. 11, in the fourth floor conference room of the Wallace State Office Building for informational presentations.

Members of the commission are Kim Francisco, Elizabeth Garst, Carol Kramer, Gregory Drees, Janelle Rettig, William Bird and Tammi Kircher. The Director of the DNR is Richard Leopold.

The following is the agenda for the February meeting.

- Approve Agenda
- Approve Minutes of Jan. 8 Meeting
- Director's Remarks
- Construction Projects
  - Dolliver State Park, Webster County – Flood Damage Repairs
- Land Acquisition Projects
  - Brushy Creek State Recreation Area, Webster County – Land Exchange – Phillip Richardson et al
  - Lake Wapello State Park, Davis County – Dean and Lois Eakins
- Land Management Projects
  - Albright Bridge Access – Hamilton County Conservation Board

- Management Agreement – Tunnel Mill Access – Hamilton County Conservation Board
- Notice of Intended Action - Chapter 15, General License Regulations
- Agreement with Louisa Soil and Water Conservation District
- Agreement with Boone Soil and Water Conservation District
- Wildlife Habitat Promotion with Local Entities Program Grant Review
- Notice of Intended Action – Chapter 71, Nursery Stock Sale to the Public
- Final Rule – Chapter 13, Permits and Easement for Construction and Other Activities on Public Lands and Waters
- Fish Habitat Promotion with Local Entities Program Grant Review
- Lake Delhi Lake Dredging and Related Improvements Grant
- Lake Rathbun Section 1135 Corps of Engineers Habitat Restoration Project
- Donations
- Honey Creek Resort State Park Monthly Update
- General Discussion
  - Commission Board Position Vote
- Items for Next Meeting, March 12, in Wright County

**For more information, contact Melissa Speed, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, at 515-281-8650.**

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